



# FORCES

FORCES

## Editorial

**Grand Canyon**, a recent film, depicts a violent LA in which Steve Martin's character steps out of his Ferrari and gets shot in the leg by a robber after his Rolex; Kevin Kline's character takes a wrong turn leaving a Raiders game and ends up in Watts where a gang drags him from his stalled BMW; a single, African-American mother in the same neighborhood dives to the floor screaming for her daughter in a drive-by shelling of her home.

The video cover describes this as an "uplifting" movie. Obviously, with such an epithet, this movie is not about violence. It does acknowledge that life-changing incidents occur, and many of such changes result from a world out of control, in a world where nature spews monsters who bear guns, abandon babies, and eschew family bonds. But that world also spews caring people who rescue victims of the armed attack, stop to pick up the abandoned baby hidden in shrubbery, or find a job and apartment for the terrified mother cowering in the shelled tenant home she occupies.

The title of the movie offers the key: in the midst of the violence, people find love, show compassion, see beauty. In other words, they can stand at the rim of the canyon. In Greek there is a word that better expresses the meaning of the awesome power that they encounter there: *deinos* refers to something that is both terrible and wondrous at the same time. For example, encountering the Grand Canyon is awe inspiring in several ways: it is dangerous or terrible (the park rangers still record one or two deaths each year of careless hikers who take "the 12-second tour") and it is wondrous (the grandeur of it can suck the breath of the most calloused soul).

As I contemplated the goal of this edition of *Forces*, I found this aspect of the film resourceful in illustrating the unifying idea behind this publication. That idea? This staff has emphasized the impact of art on the individual. How does art impact them? some Philistines may ask. The answer lurks in the caverns of confusion facing us in daily struggles frighteningly similar to those exaggerated in *Grand Canyon*. Many of us have been touched by crime, have encountered the disintegrating family, have found the ledger bleeding at the end of the month. The problems of *Grand Canyon's* LA are our own to greater or lesser degrees. The promise is ours as well.

This staff sees art as the link. Certainly not that art is always uplifting or magnificent, but it does emerge from the desire of another human being who seeks to communicate out of the realization that while insignificant, humans can still exist--we can stand on

the rim of the canyon and not disappear. Each work of art, whether poetry or pottery, fiction or photography, painting or sculpture, emerges from an individual encounter with a wide range of experiences, and only in the communication of that unique perspective can the inner voice gain expression. That expression, then, finds meaning as others encounter and recreate the sense of it. At that moment of understanding, art expresses the promise of something more than a limp from the wound made by a handgun or the emptiness of Central at 5:15. It insures our awareness of each other, of ourselves.

The staff of this edition of *Forces* reviewed the submissions accepted by the honors creative writing class of Spring 1991 and found this unifying theme. They decided that art helps individuals look inside and examine the crags and canyons within. They sat in meetings in my office and discussed the thread that ran through the various art forms and decided that it makes no difference whether artists write poetry or fiction, take or paint pictures, sculpt pottery or wire; all hear an almost inaudible voice that echoes from their depths and if they stand at the rim of their souls they can hear. And only when they hear can they create in the midst of the chaos of a world reeling out of control.

That is what this staff hopes to suggest both in the choice of the works and in the arrangement of those works as they appear in the journal. Moreover, by choosing to interview Robert Nelsen, they hope to imply that the suggestions he makes about writing apply equally to the other arts as well. In other words, it makes no difference what medium one chooses; the degree of risk in expression seems to determine the artfulness of the product.

E. M. Forster once said that he wrote to see what he was thinking about. This staff believes that encountering an artful expression in any medium also allows that introspection, and they urge the readers of this journal to explore the works with that goal in mind.

This is the last edition of the honors journal. In the future, the honors program will undertake different projects. Future editions of *Forces* will assume a new format although each will remain the product of the creative writing classes with students making the selections and compiling the journals. As editor, I encourage anyone interested in submitting work to do so, and I also encourage students to consider joining the editorial staff by enrolling in Brown's creative writing class.

Peggy Brown



## FORCES

## Volume V

Fall 1992

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# Patience and Persistence

Cindy Johnson

With a single touch on the lovely white ivory  
She finds herself beyond reality and submitting to  
instant peace  
Black and white caresses her body  
embraces her life  
and makes complete  
the thoughts that wander wantonly for a home--

She touches the heart of the keyboard  
making it laugh or cry  
Only asking to be recognized by the deaf ears  
glaring in the darkness

A single candle turns white keys to a soft yellow  
asking not for payment except in music which  
might otherwise be neglected

Her hands are tired now, but still she plays,  
plays and listens and waits  
for the music to set her free.



# Mortal Cry of Odysseus

Barbara Reed

With Athena at your heels,  
stroking your tawny hands with magic,  
forge and mold the ore with careful persuasion  
to make a shield for battle.  
A sea of maleficent foe lap at my feet,  
peer o'er a near ridge.  
Crush molten ore against your cold steel anvil!  
Meld together the warm and cold of mother earth.  
Transfer the strength of earth's warm blood  
from flaming furnace to fragile mortals.  
I am Greek, the strongest of men,  
a hairs width beneath the shoulders of the gods.  
Send my message, the sound of my horn  
shall glean the ears of Zeus and Athena  
and they shall hasten to my side.  
The stealthy queues and arcs are rising o'er nearest crest,  
their bow and lance aimed stalwart.  
Quickly, my shield!  
Guardians, surround me!  
A tip of a dove's tail beneath the brow of the gods,  
I am of earthlike mortality.  
Protect me in this last battle  
to ensure my rapturous union with my loyal queen.



Kay Jacobs

And Words Shall Break Their Hearts



"I won't make excuses. It never should have happened. I don't know. Maybe I secretly wanted it to happen. I knew he wouldn't be able to handle it, but somehow I managed to convince myself he stood a chance. Actually, I wasn't hard to convince. You see, I really hoped he would make it. Of course, he didn't, and I alone take responsibility."

"Yes. We'll get back to that. Who was he?"

## And I Alone

*Steve Gaston*

"His name was Frank Stemac. What's more important is that he was a loser. Oh, don't look at me like that. It's not some arbitrary judgment of mine. He was born into this world destined to lose. He tried to be good in sports, and he blew it. He couldn't get a date to save his life. Quite a bit of irony, isn't it?"

"Are you saying he wasn't fit to live?"

"You're a real bundle of laughs, officer Peter Colbath."

Glancing up from his notebook, Peter once more studied the young man sitting across from him. Eric Thompson was around nineteen, tall, and brown in both hair and eyes. He wore jeans and a jacket around a powerful frame and had a smirk that never quite went away. Peter knew Eric was trying to goad him. Peter had been on this job too long for that to happen.

"Is that a yes?"

Instantly, Eric jumped up.

"No, that's not a yes! Frank had just as much right to live as you do. All I'm saying is that if I had to live my life with all my dreams passing me by and ending up at the bottom of the heap, I hope I'd have the courage to kill myself."

"Frank had as much right to live as I do. Are you saying you have more?"

Eric laughed. "Who, me? Haven't you heard? I'm a bastard. I didn't deserve to get born, let alone live. At least that's society's judgment. Personally, I think society can go to hell."

"Any particular reason?"

"Because it's full of a bunch of small-minded hypocrites who are too afraid to face the truth. Of course, if you mean why am I a bastard, let's just say I'm a child molester and leave it at that."

"I wouldn't go around saying that if I were you."

"Why? Because it might affect someone's delicate sensibilities? I think it's a little late to prevent that. But it's all right: let the bible thumping, backwoods, moral majority come screaming for my blood. If I have any guts, I'll laugh in their face."

"You're not very religious, are you?"

"Oh, I like religion. The problem is that most people don't understand it. They go through their whole lives watching good, decent people get hurt for no reason, and it scares the hell out of them. So, they pray that someone somewhere is going to make it all even out in the end. I can't live like that. It took me a long time to be able to face reality head on. Though I think Frank understood in the end."

"Getting back to that. You, Frank, and who?"

"No, it was Frank and I alone."

"Why would you hang out with a loser?"

"Because I was his friend. He couldn't get a date, but he had lots of friends. The eternal paradox of a nice guy."

"If you were his friend, why did you want this to happen to him?"

For a long time Eric stood thinking. When he finally sat down the smirk was gone.

"Look, I'm just going to start at the beginning. I won't leave out anything important, so just sit there and be quiet."

"It started Friday. That's when I gave Frank the fake I.D. He was really excited. Except for school he almost never went out, so the thought of hanging out at a bar was very liberating to him. When Saturday came, he kept talking about all the wild fun we were going to have."

"Anyway, we went into a sleazy bar downtown. Its name was Roadstop. Since this was Frank's first time drinking, I only had a couple of beers. It didn't take long for Frank to be feeling real good. Then, we sat around for a few minutes. Frank kept talking about how he was going to be rich and famous. I was pretty much bored. Suddenly, Frank stood up and half staggered over to another table."

"There was this girl sitting there. Just to be sexist, I'll

call her a babe. She filled out a tank top and had this real short skirt on. It wasn't hard to guess she knew her way around. The strange thing was that even though she was out of his league, she was not trying to get rid of him. In fact, she started coming on to him. By the time I figured out what she was up to, her boyfriend had arrived. This guy was big and he wasn't happy. He was just about to hit Frank when I got there. I have to give the Neanderthal credit. When he saw two of us, he calmed down fast.

"That's when he said, 'Get out of here, asshole, and if you ever get near her again I'll kill you.'

"Frank stood up calmly, and replied, 'Can you say that outside?'

"I couldn't believe it when Frank actually headed for the door. Fortunately, I still had my senses, so I grabbed him. I tried to tell him there was no way he could beat this guy, but Frank just said he wasn't afraid. When I looked in his eyes I knew I couldn't convince him otherwise. Frank had just lost so often, he had to try, no matter what. So, I let him go. I kept trying to come up with reasons he could win, but deep down I knew he was going to get slaughtered. I even wanted it to happen. I wanted him to get beaten up so badly he finally had to accept the truth. It didn't take long for the fight to start, and I alone watched. The girl in question hadn't even bothered to come outside.

"After a few minutes, I couldn't believe my eyes: Frank was actually winning. He had to be outweighed by at least fifty pounds, but he was winning. Frank had a bloody nose and the start of some good bruises when it was over, but I had never seen Frank so completely happy than when he was standing over that guy.

"That's when I saw the knife. It was a stupid thing for that guy to do, considering how fast I got my gun out. Of course, I wasn't fast enough. You know it's a lie what they say about things slowing down in a crisis. I never saw anything move so fast as that knife going into him.

Frank never even saw it coming. Not even the bullet came close."

"Why did you kill Frank?"

"They were both lying there on the ground, and the blood from that jerk's head started running towards him. I didn't want the blood touching him. I bent down to move him, and he moaned. Then he coughed up some blood, and I..I."

"Go on."

"I looked in his eyes. The idiot was dying, but he was still happy. For a long time I didn't understand that. Finally, it hit me. Frank, the loser, had actually won. Since he wasn't likely to make it, I decided to send him out in a blaze of glory. Even when he saw the gun, his expression didn't change. That's when I pulled the trigger again, and I alone walked away."

Silence filled the room. Peter closed up the notebook. Eric was too young to be in a mess like this. They all were. Peter got up, but before he left, he needed to say something. Something that would get this kid thinking straight.

"You really should get a lawyer. The coroner said Frank would have survived if prompt action had been taken. A jury is just not going to accept an 'I knew he was going to die' defense."

The smirk returned to Eric's face.

"I'm not having a defense. I'm going to plead no contest. See, that's the problem with the rest of society. They're real quick to condemn other people, but when it comes to them, they are to be forgiven. I'll admit I'm scared, but if Frank of all people could face it, then so can I. I'm a guilty bastard, mister policeman, and I alone will take the consequences."



**Amber Dye**  
(untitled)

I've died a hundred times  
before your silence  
rang true  
to my heart  
that screamed for your ears  
to hear my timid voice say  
I need you.



Brian Douce

Self Portrait

# Light

Carla Kraft

You sometimes wonder what it's all about  
when life seems hard and no way's out  
you want to run but you can't hide  
so you hope and pray for the end of the night.

It's just a matter of time until you see  
darkness isn't real--it only seems to be.  
Set your sights above the clouds,  
embrace the silver laughter dancing your direction.

The answer's in you, with you, always leading  
subtle shades of light, perfect patterns weaving  
gently streaming, never fading, only changing colors.  
Open up your eyes, high into the skies.

Open your eyes.



Judith Ratcliff

Untitled



"The central neurosis of our time is emptiness," states Carl Jung. How accurately Mr. Jung depicted in one sentence the agonizing theme of the whole twentieth century. At least this is the state of mind that my pregnant body is in on the way to work today. The charcoal-gray sky blankets the captives of the white-striped center lanes in a smothering way. The year is 1974, and it is about to give way to a new one. For me, the new year will shovel on another responsibility, be it a tiny bundle, still more than I think that I am ready for.

Having spent the bleakest hours of the morning scraping and chipping the sheet of clouded, opaque ice from the windshield, the warmth of the car is at least some small crumb of comfort to me. As I listen to the radio squeak out the traffic jams, wrecks, stalled vehicles, and alternate routes, I sink lower in my seat and resolve myself to the slow, jerking, uneventful drive into Dallas once again. Traveling at the pace of a Jimmy Stewart sentence, I am able to clearly see the diverse personalities of my co-journeymen. To my left, on this carpet of cement, creeps an ancient 1953 Chevy pickup, supporting an equally ancient old man, obviously hung over, gulping coffee with one hand and puffing long drags off a well worn cigarette with the other hand. To my right floats an emerald green Jaguar that fills your nostrils with aromas of themes in the finest shops in the west. The haggard face that controls this beautiful machinery turns my direction and all but screams in frustration and agitation to be at least one car length ahead. In my rearview mirror, I can see the all-too-familiar powder blue mini-van driven by a half-crazed mother with from three to five car seats strapped into it. Mom is wildly flailing backwards, sideways, up, down, to accommodate all her cherubs at once. I caress my own unborn cherub and groan as I view what I am in for. I stare in disbelief at the compact, mustard-colored Chevette in the space directly ahead of my protruding bumper. The young woman evidently accomplished no personal hygiene or grooming at home this morning: she is pulling out electric hot rollers, teasing, spraying, and combing her hair. Now comes the full make-up job. I give her a lecture in my mind, "Didn't anyone teach you to keep both of your hands on the wheel at all times?" I honk in disgust to let her know that the light is now green. I do not care that she does not appreciate it any more than I would.

We creep and crawl, light after dreary red light, making our way as if we had all turned on our auto pilot switches. "I Owe, I Owe, So Off To Work I Go," is the attempt of one bumper sticker to make sense of this ever-so-daily trek. Heavily clothed joggers bounce by us as we sit and inch forward every now and then. Dazed men sit at the bus stops as we pass, while the unfed, homeless dogs become their instant, unwanted friends. Everyone is in a hurry, looking for the perfect opportunity to slash the nose of their vehicle into the

solid line of cars. School zones are the most dreaded signs on the road for morning drivers. We are so annoyed at being controlled by a sign that dictates our speed and provokes us to stop when a person clad in a yellow slicker trudges into the lane of traffic, laboring with his right hand to raise the red octagonal stop sign that brings us jerking to a halt once more. The Jaguar to my right takes his liberty to zip into the 7-11 for a fast cup of steamy brew and a pack of cigarettes. He gets his purchase and is back out of the parking lot without losing a car length.

As I turn onto McKinney I see the familiar dirty beige brick elementary school building to my right. The

## Cubicles of Isolation

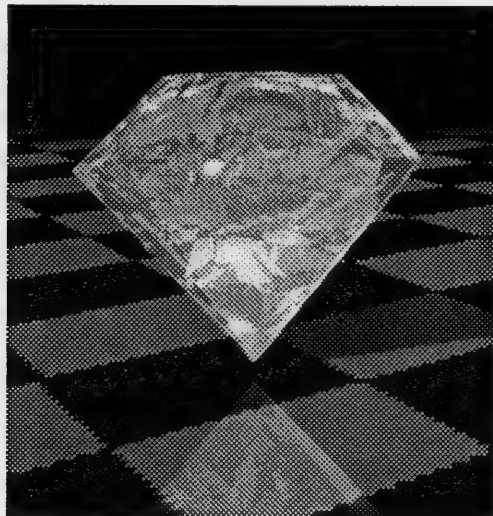
*Connie Singleton*

bundled-up children have layers of sweaters, mufflers, coats and gloves around their small bodies. Their parents drop them at this under-equipped playground early to await the opening of the building while they make their own winding trail to places of employment. As the bell peals to signify that it is 8:00 a.m., I rally back to the immediacy of my task. Only fifteen minutes to get to the bulging parking lot, find an empty spot, trudge across the cold pavement, and clock in before I'm late. I see three jam-packed lanes of traffic with people sitting car door to car door, all praying their car will cross the intersection before the light turns red again. We all have the attitude that at least three cars can go through the intersection after the red light appears. As close as I am to making work on time, it will come right down to the wire. I can feel the shoulders of my car brace themselves as if to say, "Don't even think of trying to get in front of me." The clock pounds inside my head, and the seconds that I sit on this exhaust-fumed treadmill of concrete feel like hours. We haven't nudged even a snail's length in two minutes. I jerk my neck around the steering wheel, straining to find the perpetrator of the crime. A broken car, a flat tire? At the very least, someone had better be hurt. The vehicles that encompass me hold vultures behind the wheels of their steering columns who are ready to devour the road blockage ahead. As I give up in disgust, my anguish frames a picture that denies reality. Stumbling off the orange, red, and black

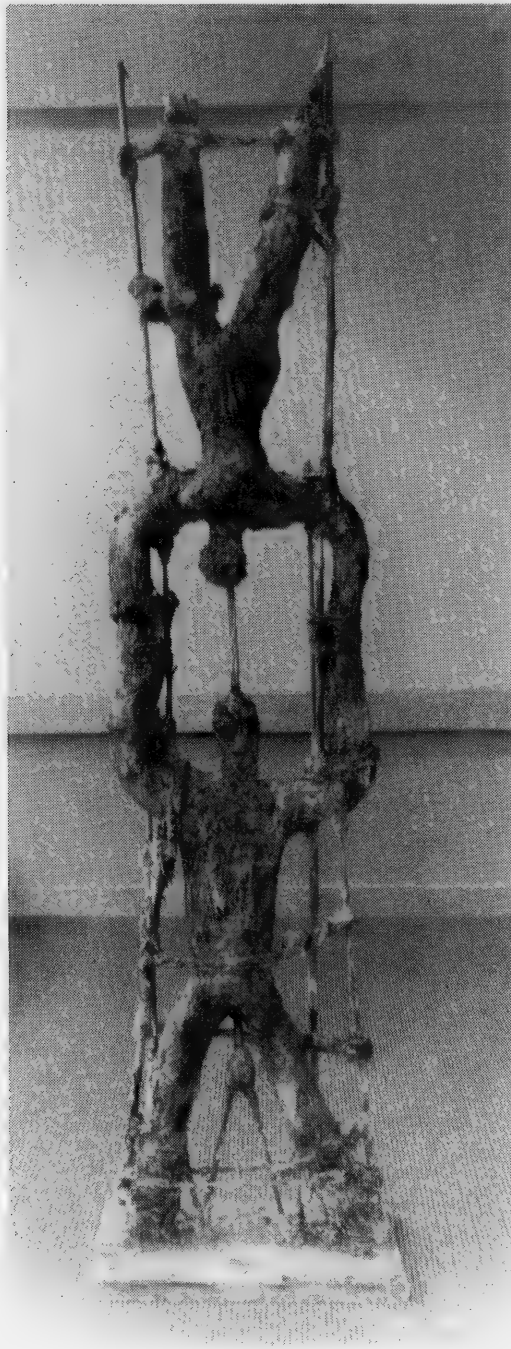
graffitied slab of sidewalk is a tiny, bundled woman. The multi-colored wool stocking cap is pulled tightly down around her ears and gives her a smaller appearance. Her thick-heeled shoes and heavy beige support stockings quickly date her. In her hand she protectively grasps a white cane. Tap, tap, tap. This elderly woman's false eyes offer her no assistance across the angry, dirty, hurried light crossing. The white cane begins to knock against one car and then another. I watch in suspense as she whirls around and stands still, afraid to move deeper into the darkness. Her steps become awkward and uncertain as she travels clumsily down the rows of car doors. Tap, tap, tap, tap. The white compass tries to find its way back to recognition. The coal-black door that boasts a high-gloss shine quietly, but deliberately, swings open with purpose. All eyes are upon this knight in his black, pin-striped, double-breasted suit as he steps forward to take the blind princess by her wrinkled hand. The car engines seem to shush: a sweet lullaby frames this scene in the music of the streets. Six lanes—on-coming and passing traffic—halt in silence, held back by angelic wings. I sit up tall, breathing slightly: I fear I might awake and this will all be a dream. The ebony prince escorts his damsel in distress safely to shore on the other side of the sea of traffic. Her grateful face speaks more than words could ever do, but the gentle patting of the trembling hand on the Goliath, black-gloved fist shows us the genuine thank you that is being expressed to her young saviour. I travel every step with this twentieth century Samaritan, back to his coach, where

he gallantly disappears from view behind darkly tinted windows. I never saw him again.

Some fifteen years have gone by, and I still cherish reliving that day in my mind's picture album. I suppose that I drove on to work that day. The rest of that day is now a blur to me. The black clouds that held me captive are gone. The sun's warmth shines in my being now. The happiness of birth and the future are real to me today, because of the time that I was privileged to see one human being touch another human being. The overbearing rat race has been brought to its knees by the sound of the tapping of a single white cane. I don't look at my companions on the road in the same way anymore. They are real people to me, friends who will help me if I am stranded. The mothers I see flailing about in their frenzy are admirable, patient women to me now. The beauty shop on wheels I now view with sympathy for its operator's lack of time or inadequate organization. All have become fallible people like myself. But which of us will turn our back on the others' need? We all hold different roles as we behold the tiny blind woman. To some of us she is our beloved mother, honored grandmother, attached sister, long-suffering wife, dear cousin, or elderly aunt. We connect with her at our point of need. For me, this woman is an angel of human vulnerability who has been rescued by an ordinary act of love, which restores my vision of human kindness and replaces selfishness with brotherhood.







Susan Wilson

Acrobats

## On Saying Goodbye

Debra Galliher

The stained glass reflects  
red, purple, and green blotches  
on your widow's face.

# Someday

Amber Dye

I'll give you  
the soul in my heart,  
my body in your arms.  
Carefully touching  
your eyes  
with mine  
combining a love  
the years will feed;  
growing slowly  
is a sure sign  
of our faith  
in each truth.  
Our minds are adjacent  
as our bodies will be.



# The Shroud of Penelope

Jane Piscionieri-Wuerdeman

With my Lord gone so long  
the suitors do abound,  
and I know  
I must keep them at bay  
but they do not accept my feeble nay,  
and so I devise a plan to ward them off, so as to let me keep  
the peace and loyalty that I yearn within.  
Thus, I thought I would create  
a shroud for my lord to wear.  
With nimble fingers I weave all day,  
for everyone to see the work  
in earnest that I do to push  
the suitors away.  
Then by the light of the moon  
I silently undo  
the threads of the shroud  
that will never let me end  
this task that I undertook  
to help sustain my loyalty to my King  
While as gently as I can,  
I pluck away at my work  
until the threads are undone.  
It seems as though they are  
the cords of love in my heart that I take apart,  
and  
yet I know my lord will return.....  
for my Destiny  
is to be  
by his side  
for eternity.

# Rush Hour

Debra Galliher

Central Expressway—  
brake-dancing fools fly along  
blinded by sunrise.



Nancy Davenport

Untitled



For as long as I can remember, my grandmother helped my parents rear my brother, two sisters, and me. When we moved to Plano from San Antonio, my parents decided that my grandmother was no longer capable of taking care of herself and asked her to move in with us. From then on, my grandmother became my roommate. She and I became very close. I admired many of her personality traits and her affection. As she grew older, it was our turn to take care of her. I began to feel she was my responsibility and did all I could to make her feel comfortable. Knowing about her fear of hospitals, on one occasion I spent the night with her and slept by her side, holding her like a baby. This was her last trip to the hospital, yet when she was released she was not assured good health.

One day my mother took her to the doctor for what she thought was a routine check-up. My mother sat me down and relayed what the doctor had told her.

"Sandy, Grandma is not doing well. The doctor said that both of her kidneys have failed, and she will undoubtedly go into 'renal failure.'"

"What is that? Is it serious?"

"The doctor said she probably won't make it through Thanksgiving. The toxins from her kidneys will poison her blood, and she will eventually die."

I was not a young child, and I understood what she was saying, but it did not seem likely. I thought that surely they were overreacting. She seemed fine to me. Her character had not changed, and she still made us laugh, not knowing she was funny. After all, they did not know her the way I did. I would be the first person to realize that her health was failing.

My mother, being a devout Catholic, a few days later asked our priest to come over and give her the "last rites" of the church. "Yeah, whatever," I thought to myself. Later that evening as I was getting ready for bed, I sat down next to her and asked, "Grandma, how do you feel?"

"Good." She replied.

"Do you know that you are not well?"

"No, I'm O.K."

"Does your side hurt?"

"No," she answered.

"Good, then you'll be ready to go jogging tomorrow."

She let out a snicker and gave an amused, "mañana!"

When Thanksgiving came around, Grandma was still

## My Loss of Someone Close

*Sandy Hernandez*

alive—as I knew she would be. Everyone else was amazed that she was still holding up so well, but not me; I knew she was fine. Besides, if there was any way to "show up" those "know-it-alls," she would do it. Still, there was the chance that what I was told could actually be true. I left for school in the mornings fearing that they might call me out of class to tell me my grandmother had passed away. Every day upon returning home, I would immediately go to my room to make sure that she was all right.

After Thanksgiving, my grandmother's health began to deteriorate. She would constantly tell my mother and me she loved us. She sounded like a broken record, and it occasionally annoyed us. I understood it to be that she realized she was sick and did not want to die leaving us to wonder how she felt about us. She became insecure and no longer wanted to be left alone. The only time we could leave her by herself comfortably was when she was sleeping. One morning, as I was getting ready for school, she had awakened and asked me, "Where are you going?"

"To school, Grandma."

"Don't leave me!"

"I have to."

"Take me with you!"

"I can't, Grandma, I don't think my teachers would like that." I found that remark rather humorous. Surely she knew she could not follow me to school. She got out of bed, grabbed her cane and my hand, saying, "Come on, let's go." When I rejected her the second time, she began to cry. I put her back in bed and laid down next to her until she went back to sleep. As I ran my fingers

through her hair and scratched her back, I realized she was afraid of dying alone.

My mother thought that it would be nice to reunite all my grandmother's children. This was the first time they had been together as a family in forty years. We thought she was fighting her death so that she might see her children one last time, but even after they left, she was still alive and kicking. At least, that is what I thought.

We came to the conclusion that if it was not her children she was waiting to see, it was Christmas. By this time she was bedridden, and the only time she got out of bed was when we put her in a wheelchair and took her for a stroll. She did not say very much, but every once in a while she would hold my hand and say, "Don't get old." She understood that I understood she was in a lot of pain, although she never made it noticeable.

We felt she awaited each holiday, the next one being New Year's Day. Not only did it bring in another year, it also brought my grandmother's eighty-ninth birthday. I realized that I had to accept my grandmother's death and let her go. I did not want to do so, but I felt as if she was waiting for my permission to die. I sat on her bed beside her and said solemnly, "Grandma, I don't know if you understand what I'm saying, but I love you. You have taught me so many things, and I will always cherish our relationship, but I know that you are tired. You have lived a full life, and there is no use hanging on. I will never forget you, and you will always have a special place in my heart, but now it is time for you to rest. It's O.K. for you to die. No one will be mad at you, and you won't feel any more pain."

After the holidays my grandmother appeared to have become better over night. I no longer felt obligated to

spend all my time with her, because I thought she still had several months to live. One evening, as I strolled in from work, my mother asked me to check on her. I walked in my room assuming she was asleep. My mother stood in the doorway watching me and asked, "Is she O.K.?"

Hoping that I was mistaken, I turned to my mother calmly and told her, "Mom, I don't think she is breathing."

Mom said, "Well, she probably isn't," as she examined her a little closer and confirmed she was not.

A tear ran down my face, and all of a sudden I felt numb. I stared at her and became angry, because she left without telling me good-bye or allowing me to be by her side when she died. I remembered all the funny things she would say to me. The moment I had been denying had finally come true. I had a few minutes with her to myself when I realized....I was alone.

I watched as the coroner took her body away, but it was no longer she. Without life, that was not my grandmother. My room felt empty and I immediately missed her. Yet I understood, even though I did not want to say good-bye. That night I went to bed without my roommate, without my friend, without my grandmother.

Although my grandmother's death caused me a period of grief, the memories of her cause me much joy. The time we shared together could never be replaced. I knew that my grandmother would never die, because she had earned a place in my heart. Every time something reminds me of her, I realize that although she may not be with me on earth, she still lives in my memories.







Janet Sherrill

Untitled

# The Water's Fine

Victoria Monfort

I like to swim through the city's night. It's a test of bravado or something. We walk uphill past a doorway reeking of urine where a person is sleeping or dead, past the water garden looking like a fairy landscape, past the walls of concrete blushing in the twilight.

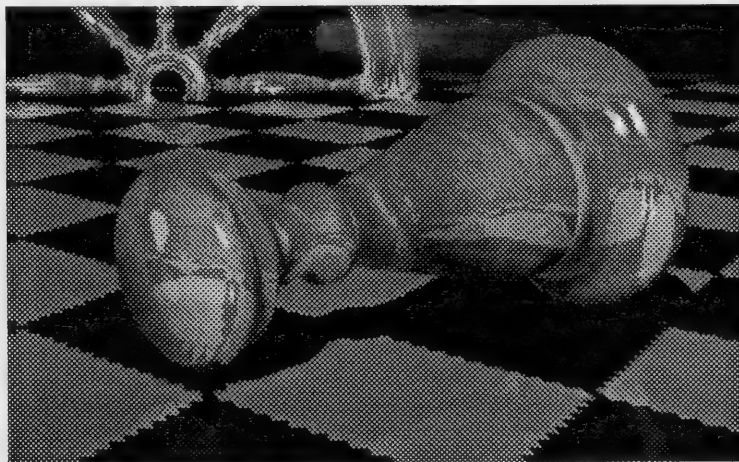
Distorted bass wraps around the buildings like an arrhythmic heartbeat luring us to the source. The source is full of kids, dogs, yuppies, and bums. I see secretaries catch a later bus; I see business travelers jog from their hotel rooms surprised by the moment; I see retired couples lean back in folding chairs swirling wine coolers and pointing at the stars. I study their faces and imagine their lives. People sprawl over pavement on blankets and are more comfortable and more correct than the person in the doorway.

We circle like sharks, then hover between Ross and the stage on our backs on the steps. It's an artificial sort of night, the clouds borrowed from Pirates of the Caribbean in Disneyworld, the sleek angular buildings overlaid on acetate with aircraft beacons flashing oddly in unison with the syncopated beat. The bald man bobs his shiny head, but his message is muddled by marble walls and glass. If he plays it just right, all the sound waves will return to the stage at once and blow him up. Across Ross the old church glows warm yellow in the shadow of the steel blue skyscraper. Welcome to the nineties, I think.

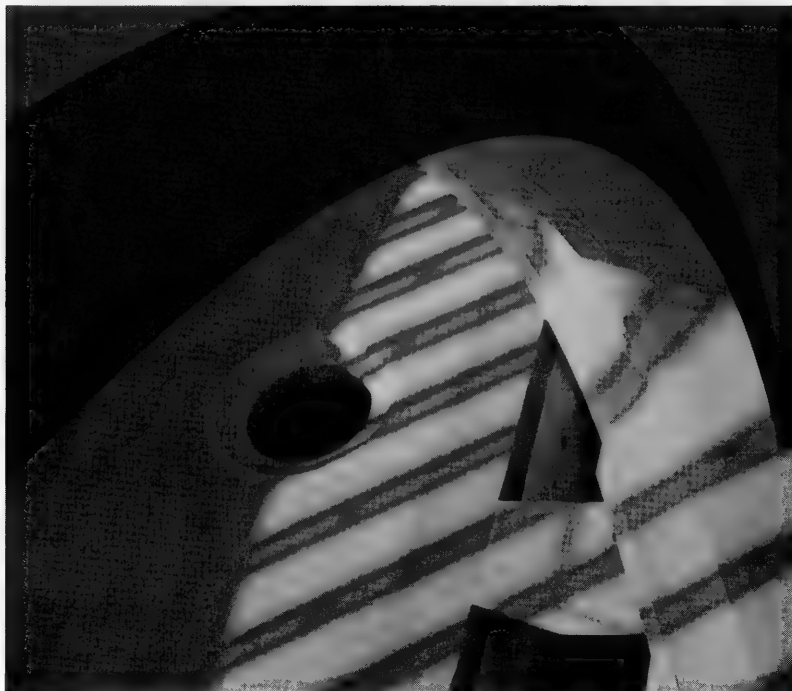
We leave when our backs hurt and walk to the West End. A more intelligible beat calls to us from a side street where we find a six-piece jazz band lighting up a virtually empty restaurant and bar. We order a beer. The music flows about knee deep in here. It curls and coils up the legs and backs of the chairs and you can see it climbing and trailing up to the ceiling in the corners of the room. This band, this place, at this hour is jazz. The folks who look around trying to know how to move right are gone.

The sparse crowd is mesmerized, each person's body sways somehow responding to a part of the tune. This band improvises, and they pull us along the plank with them. We all grin when we land without a splash. Their eyes follow their music around the walls; their bodies and instruments pulse and lure thought deep into complicated rhythms. The flute player sits on the side, twitching, anticipating his moment when the wiry sax man yields the microphone. We struggle for breath as he winds down an incredibly long solo, and soar when the flute man springs up and drops to one knee to carry us further.

We send thought out on the music and get it back free of care. We give our burden to the smiling jazz men, who lead it on such a chase it comes back happy. Swimming through the night we are restored.







Greg Nichols

Untitled



John K. Lynn

Untitled

## Writer, Teacher, Editor: An Interview with Robert Nelsen

by Don Killen

Robert S. Nelsen, a professor at The University of Texas at Dallas, teaches fiction writing and literary studies to graduate and undergraduate students. Dr. Nelsen has published numerous short stories and many academic papers dealing with philosophy and politics. He has recently finished a collection of short stories, *Orphans, Bums and Angels*. His stories reach into the depths of human experience and produce moments when readers are forced to stop and think—think about life and love and that which matters. Dr. Nelsen received his Ph.D. at The University of Chicago. He is Executive Editor of *Common Knowledge*, a new journal published by Oxford University Press.

FORCES: Dr. Nelsen, you're a professor teaching literature at U.T.D., you're the Executive Editor of a brand new eclectic, interdisciplinary, highly international journal called *Common Knowledge*, you've written and published a number of short stories, some of which have won prizes. What motivates you to write?

NELSEN: On my bulletin board is a story I wrote when I was five: "It all started in a house down in Getalong, Utah, where Snicklefritz lived." I think I write so that I can write better than I did when I wrote that story. I write because that's what I do, that's what I am. People aren't writers because they're born that way—they're only writers if they wrote that day. This morning I got up early and wrote, so today I'm a writer. If I don't get up and write tomorrow morning, I won't be a writer—I am, because I will get up early again tomorrow. My motivation has a lot to do with competition with myself, with being better than I was. Also, I'm a left-over from the sixties—I still want to change the world. In the sixties I thought I could do it by protesting, by establishing scholarships for black athletes, by leading groups on marches. None of that stuff really worked. We didn't make a lasting difference. Everything seems to be getting worse—or at least it's not as good as I want it to be. I hope that if fiction can be used not as a weapon but as a way of communication, then maybe there's still a way to change individuals, maybe even the world.

FO: The pen is mightier than the sword.

NE: Yes. Each one of my stories is meant to move someone. In my classes, in my stories, I stress closure. The reason I want closure is because that's the only way I am certain that someone will be moved.

FO: So, your primary motivation is an epiphany or a part of the story which moves someone?

NE: Joyce coined the phrase "epiphany." He believed that an epiphany is supposed to give the "whatness" of life. I don't know what "whatness" is, but I know that if there is closure, there is a moment of pause, a moment of stillness, a moment of thought. That's real communication, even if it's silent communication. It's not a message, it's not a theme. And I write for that purpose: I write to provide those moments of silence and thought.

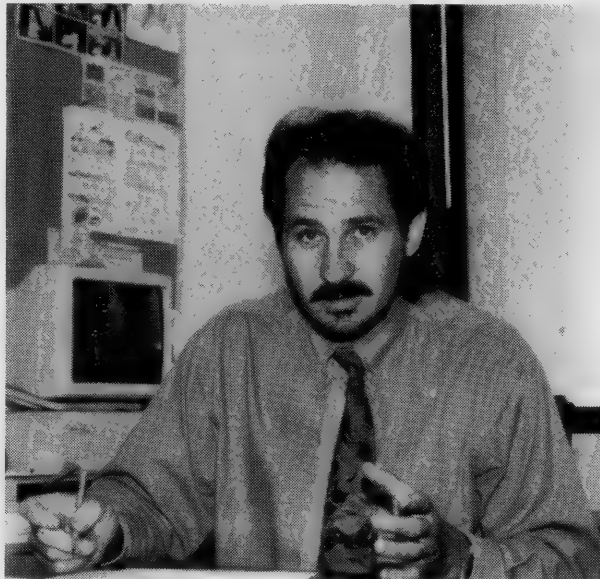
FO: Moments when the reader says, "Oh, that's what."

NE: Even if they don't know "that's what," even if they just go, "oh, oh, shit, what's going on here?" The pause. We don't pause enough in our lives today, and one of the powers of fiction is to make

you pause. There is no pause in movies—we go simply for the entertainment. Aristotle said that the highest pleasure was imitation, imitation that involves education. It's not that you educate through writing so that readers actually learn x, y, or z. It's that if they have this moment of pause, they might learn something.

FO: How would you describe the process you use in writing or teaching writing?

NE: For me, writing has to be discovery. If you write what you know, you won't discover anything. If you write what you don't know, I think the possibility of discovering something is much greater. I try to teach people that they don't need to write their autobiographies, that they don't need to depend on their real lives. The meaning that is within their souls will be captured on the page if they write what they don't know. Flannery O'Connor said (and Robert Frost





said something very similar) that if the writer doesn't discover something, then how do we expect the reader to discover anything. So, I try to teach that you begin by putting your soul in jeopardy with the first sentence, and then you prosecute forward from that first sentence to the last sentence, each sentence leading into the next, each sentence trying to discover something from the last sentence.

FO: A process of self discovery?

NE: It's self-discovery by the creation of a plot that doesn't have anything to do with you. It does have to do with the meaning of you, but not with the historical you.

FO: In your classes, you say to write about your obsessions, to write about what matters to you.

NE: People come to the class with stories they want to tell. They trust those stories; they believe that those stories have meaning in them. They want to communicate. All of us want to communicate when we write. We want to give something meaningful to someone else. They worry that they will not be able to communicate unless they communicate a plot that they know. I think that if you write a first sentence that puts you in jeopardy, that if you get one of your personal obsessions in that first sentence, you will slather yourself all over the page. You will guarantee meaning on the page. I have many obsessions. My son, my father, my relationship to him and to my son. Every one of my stories has something to do with a father—not with my father—even if they don't have fathers in them. I'm obsessed with fathers, and the depths in the stories come from that obsession. And I'm obsessed with baptism and the role of religion, so all my stories have baptisms and blood in them, even if not overtly.

FO: Who are some of your favorite authors today?

NE: Among the younger generation, Amy Hempel, she's wonderful. Rick Bass, from here in Texas, living in Montana; Richard Ford, Mark Richard. Some that are older: Bobby Ann Mason and William Gass. The best fiction, I think, might be being written outside the United States. Milan Kundera's fiction is wonderful, Gyorgy Konrad's new novel *The Feast in the Garden* is exceptional. In Latin America, Lisa Valenzuela, Isabel Allende, Vargas Llosa, and Eduardo Galeano.

FO: UTD, as well as Collin County Community College, have taken a strong interdisciplinary approach in teaching arts and humanities. How do you feel that arts outside the pure literary have affected your work or your approach to writing? Do you use other arts in your research, for example?

NE: Yes. I came to UTD because of its interdisciplinary nature. I came here because I wanted to explore.

Fiction needs to be creative. It's important to me to be able to watch others create. I just spent some time with a student who's finishing a novel. I've been encouraging her to listen to music, because she's trying to do some modernist things in the novel. She's putting together different scenes, different sections. She's trying to create a collage. It needs to work like a symphony. We talked for a long time about how every movement in a symphony needs closure. Each one of her chapters needs the same sort of closure. I wish this were my idea—it's not, it's Milan Kundera's idea. Flannery O'Connor said all writers should be painters, even if they're not good, because painting is a way to discover; self portraits help us discover ourselves. Try painting yourself and you'll find that you really can't capture yourself perfectly on the page or on the canvas. You'll capture instead some grotesque, stylized version of yourself, a startling image. What we're trying to do in fiction is get that startling image, that one part, one side of ourselves onto the page. So, if you can paint yourself and only paint that mole on your nose, it will be good. I don't do much with film or television. As I tell students, you can't out-whore a whore. I cannot create in fiction better pectorals or better breasts or more beautiful bodies than Arnold Swartzenegger or Kim Basinger have. Likewise my car wrecks will never be as good as something that happens on film. So you're better off using traditional art if you want to incorporate art into your fiction. I avoid the newer arts such as film.

FO: You grew up in Montana near Hemingway's home, didn't you?

NE: I grew up around all sorts of writers. The one I remember the most was a writer from the '60s, Richard Brautigan. Brautigan was there—he was one of the locals who went through town all the time. There were a lot of writers there. Ford, McGuane, all sorts of people.

FO: Was this an influence on you at an early age?

NE: No, it actually turned me off writing. We were quite poor, and I wanted to get out of the valley. The writers all came to the valley, so that didn't look like an avenue out. The goal to teach, to be a professor, to know something that other people didn't know—that really drove me on and had more influence than the writers. Then, once I learned how to really read fiction—the fiction on the board here (age 5) is terrible—I began to write. Everybody has this instinct to tell stories. We all want to tell stories. But it's mostly terrible. Back when I was five, I tried to do what I now preach you can't do. My job as a teacher is to teach students not how to write, but rather how to read.

FO: To slow down and read as writers?

NE: To read as writers. There's a real difference. In a normal literature class—I didn't know this when I left

the valley (in Montana)—you're taught to read for theme and meaning and plot. What I eventually learned was to read as a writer, to read for techniques, to see how writers repeated objects, to see how they exploited an object, to see how they went from here to here, not concentrating on the action, but rather concentrating on the objects in the story. Once I learned to read, I found out how easy it was to write. It's really easy. But I've ruined reading for myself, because I can't read for plot or story or entertainment any more. I'm trying to rip off some writer. I want to see what they did, and I'm determined to do it better, damn it. Once you see how easy it is, then you can't help but want to write. We have this natural urge to tell lies, to tell stories, to entertain. If you find out you can be good, then you want to do it.

FO: How has landscape, a sense of place, affected your work?

NE: Writing needs to be rooted. It has to be rooted in concrete objects. You can't write without having a strong sense of place in writing. Being in Texas, my roots are changing. In Chicago, the stories I was writing were more urban, they had to do with the urban setting. And the concerns were urban. Here, it's not the same. We're going to Paris, Texas, this weekend because there's a cemetery there with a statue of Jesus wearing cowboy boots. The novel I'm writing now is set entirely within a cemetery. So I'm going to go there to rip off that image; it's moving to my cemetery. So you certainly need that sort of landscape.

FO: How would you describe the revision process in writing a short story or a novel?

NE: Flannery O'Connor—how much I love her—had a friend who had gotten some negative criticism on a story and was very disappointed and hurt by it, and Flannery O'Connor wrote back to this woman, "Well, if you've only rewritten it three times, of course it's supposed to be no good." James Joyce, when the galleys would come back to him, would rewrite all over the galleys. You're not supposed to touch galleys; they're the final proof. But Joyce got busy rewriting. Raymond Carver would rewrite stories up to 40 times. Flannery O'Connor again: the first story that she wrote was under her bed when she died—she had completely rewritten it. Rewriting is re-visioning. You have to re-see. Your vision is not right the first time. The idea is not to go back and correct your grammar, it's not even to go back and weird out the story so it's more particularized. It's to go back and re-see, to discover your obsessions and then to explore them further. Often the story will go in entirely new directions.

FO: So the story may turn out to be something quite different from what you thought it would be?

NE: It had better be something different than what you thought. Writing is about discovery. Not just in the

first draft—there ought to be discovery in the last draft, too.

FO: So you discover something about yourself, you discover something about your obsessions?

NE: And you discover something about the story itself. It takes on a life of its own.

FO: Do you think that creative writing classes would be beneficial for people who have no intention to pursue a writing career?

NE: Creativity is essential to whatever we do. I mean, why live unless we're being creative? I think that the tools that you learn in a creative writing class are applicable elsewhere. I tell my students that I have three goals for them. I want them to be outrageous, I want them to learn to paint with words, and I want them to exploit the words. I think those three goals apply no matter what you're going to do in an academic setting. A very bad or a very good scientific paper should be painted with words. And it should be exploitative, and it should be outrageous. But creative writing classes will only be valuable for people who can handle the criticism that needs to be a part of that class. I think that there are a lot of people who can't handle the criticism. They need to go on and do other things.

FO: How did James Joyce influence your work?

NE: Partially through epiphanies. He wanted the closure I want in stories. But he wanted more than closure, he wanted beauty. He pushed the language to the extreme. He was always willing to experiment. *Ulysses*, I guess, is my favorite novel, if you can have a favorite novel. It is the one that I go back to and learn from constantly. Joyce was always experimenting, always trying to do something different with the language, and he knew, more than any other writer that I know, that all he had was words. He wasn't afraid to do what he wanted with those words.

FO: He had words, mixed up many ways...

NE: The other thing that influenced me about Joyce is that—here's the world's greatest writer, yet he is a man who wrote to his wife when they were separated asking her to send her dirty underpants to him. He was a normal guy. He was a sexual being—he was a dirty old man in his own sort of way. He did not want to forget what Nora smelled like, and he needed that part of his life. He wasn't going to go see a prostitute, he wanted his wife, so he said, "send me your dirty underpants." I respect that, although it might sound bizarre. He was a real person. He needed his family. He needed her. He was poor, he was always borrowing money, but never did he stop being himself. He had a son and a daughter who had serious problems: the daughter was institutionalized. He kept that part of his life separate.

He didn't exploit his family in a negative way. He didn't use their experiences. He wrote his fiction, and yet he worked hard to be a father. We have these myths of the lonely writer, in the garret, out there inventing. It's all bull.

FO: What do "real writers" do?

NE: They're the most boring people I've ever known. And I know a lot of writers. They're also obnoxious. For example, if you come to my house, I'll start reading my stories because I'm trying them out on you—I want your reaction. There are the Keroacs out there who are able to be halfway crazy, but most contemporary writers are very boring, obnoxious people.

FO: What is your advice to young writers, those who aspire to writing but are not certain that it could pay or sustain them, or if they could even be successful at it?

NE: If you're in it for the money, stop. There's no money there. You're going to have to teach or edit or something. I read a statistic that over 70 percent of people graduating from major creative writing programs are now doing advertising and no longer writing. So if you're in it for the money, you have to stop. My advice is to find out if you are a writer. As I said, you are a writer only if you wrote today. So, my advice is to start writing and find out if you can write, and if you can write...

FO: So, if you think you want to be a writer, how should you pursue this? Should you take a creative writing class? Should you study basic skills first?

NE: You should devour literature first. You should read each and every thing you possibly can. You should find your own canon. You don't learn to write by imitating others; you learn to write by writing sentences that are good enough that James Joyce would have been proud of you for writing that sentence. How will you know he's proud of you? You can't go knock on his door and ask unless you've read everything he's written. I think you need to read literature, find your heroes and heroines and set them as your standards and your goals. That's why if you want to write popular literature, if you want Tom Clancy to be proud of you, read everything Tom Clancy wrote and write sentences that Tom Clancy would be proud of. I use James Joyce, I use Richard Hugo, I use Flannery O'Connor. Pick whomever you need to use—again, by devouring. Then, if you want, go on to a creative writing class. It's more important, however, that you find friends who will read your fiction and who can be critical of your work. The greatest writers never had creative writing classes. They're a modern phenomenon. Flannery O'Connor was one of the first who began with creative writing classes. But what you need, and what she had (she had Caroline Gordon, she had all sorts of people who read her stories), is a community who will read your stories. If you can only

find that at UTD or Collin County Community College, or someplace else, go there and find it. But find a community that will come back with strong criticism: "You need to do this, this and this, and this didn't work."

FO: Strong, but gentle?

NE: Strong, but gentle, but I'm not certain that any writer ever knows that it's gentle because it all feels like a whip. We all love our own work. If we didn't think that our story was the greatest story in the world, why put ourselves through the pain of writing? So, of course, any criticism hurts.

FO: Is it enough that the sentences that you write satisfy you?

NE: I don't think any writer is ever satisfied. I wish now that I could rewrite every sentence I've ever written and do it better. I know that sounds foolish and I know most people won't actually believe that. But you're constantly honing your craft, you're constantly learning, and you want to be better. I think I can write almost every sentence I've ever written better than it is now.

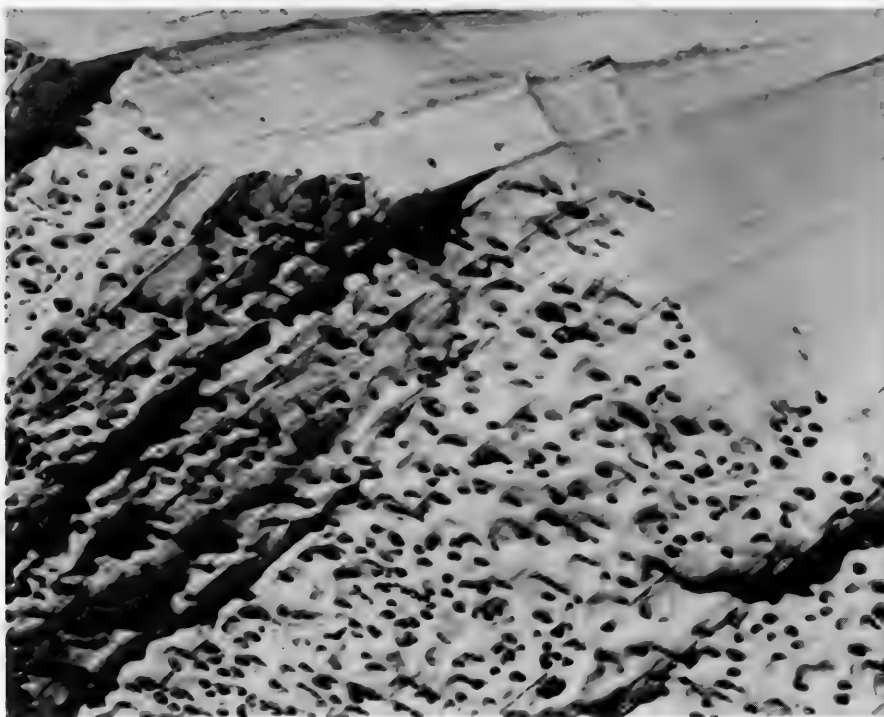
FO: Which of your stories is the one that stands out as the one you would like to be remembered for?

NE: The two pages I wrote this morning. Everything has to be better every day. Everything I've written to this point I'm embarrassed by because it's not as good as I want it to be. "Angel and Me" takes me home and allows me to understand what it means to love. I like the sentiment in that story. Most people don't like that story because of the sentiment. I'm a very sentimental person, so I guess that's the closest. On the other hand, in "The Shield She Being Built," a story I can't even get published, there is a moment in there where a little boy touches a tattoo on his father's arm, and he knows what it means to love. Anyway, that's probably as good as anything I've done, that moment where he touches. One of the myths that beginners have is that they think that they have to find their voice. Each story requires a different voice. It has to be true to the story. So I hope that each story is radically different and that none of them typify Robert Nelsen.

FO: Do you consciously try to make them different?

NE: If you start with a unique, dangerous first sentence and move forward, if you let that sentence be your conscience, you don't have to worry about being different—the sentences will make you different.







Holly K. Powell

Untitled

What's the difference between a woman suffering from PMS and a terrorist? You can negotiate with a terrorist. Jokes like this and many similar jokes concerning premenstrual syndrome have become popular material for successful comedians today. Because women have demanded a cure for this disorder, as well as demanded acceptance of PMS as a disorder, these jokes are now the rage of the nation. PMS is defined as a group of symptoms that collectively characterize a disorder occurring in the period prior to menstruation. Previously people labelled the female sufferer as "on the rag" or "flagging," and associated the negative connotations of those labels. These jokes can be very funny to females if, at the time that the female hears these jokes, she is not ragging it; otherwise they can be sufficient motive for murder.

The female who suffers from premenstrual syndrome is commonly referred to as, "the woman from hell." This is because during this period she will experience all or some of the following symptoms: water retention, crankiness, night sweats, low tolerance levels, high anxiety, and an insatiable appetite for junk food. The last symptom, by the way, is a physiological phenomenon. These symptoms are not only explainable, but justifiable as well.

Water retention, one of the universal symptoms of PMS, is when your face contorts producing a total new look similar to that of a blow fish in a defensive mode. In women, as in the fish, it creates a defense mechanism based on the premise that few, if any, would dare approach the creature when it assumes this look. In females this look serves as an effective birth control method. The face takes on added dimensions as the eyes are swallowed by the puffy folds of facial tissue surrounding them. In addition, the stomach is blown up like a hot air balloon just prior to take-off. Water retention, however, is not the only reason why PMS is touted as an effective birth control method.

Crankiness is also an effective birth control method. Consider some of the goddesses of Greek Mythology. Many Greek theologians now believe that, contrary to popular legend, Medusa suffered from PMS. On one of her cranky days, she inadvertently compared her long flowing hair to that of Athena. The beautiful goddess Athena, also suffering from PMS, became extremely agitated and changed Medusa's beautiful flowing hair into black, slithering snakes so men would not bed her. She then sentenced Medusa to her ill-fated Gorgonian demise in the cave. Medusa's PMS really flared then, and any male who looked upon her was turned to stone. This is not an abnormal reaction, however, for women suffering from PMS.

Other symptoms of PMS are the chilling night sweats. Night sweats are also an effective birth control method since few mates consider waking next to a cold, wet, shark-like creature, an aphrodisiac. These night sweats

## Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

*Debbie Sehnert*

are necessary, however, because they cleanse the body of all water so the body does not explode. This then allows the body to re-bloat the following day.

It is often said that speaking to a woman on PMS is similar to opening Pandora's Box. The male species is fully aware that engaging in conversation with an inflicted female can unleash upon him all the evils of the world regardless of what he has spoken; however, the male generally attempts a feeble, devastating conversation. Consider these plausible questions and answers between a husband and wife.

*Husband:* "You are looking very slim today, dear."

*Wife:* "Are you saying that I looked like a blimp yesterday? You swine."

*Husband:* "Would you like to have dinner out tonight?"

*Wife:* "You hate my cooking. You don't appreciate the things I do for you. You really are nothing but a swine."

The final conversation is the ultimate no-win situation for the well meaning husband. If the husband says, "I will be out of town tomorrow for a business meeting," the wife deduces that he doesn't love her and must be having an affair.

The wife then spits vehemently, "You lying, cheating scum of the earth, you're a swine."

The innocent, albeit stupid, husband will pursue by saying, "Perhaps I can postpone my trip. Would that be acceptable?"

It is at this point that the PMSing wife goes in for the kill, and conquers with, "I don't want you around, you lying, cheating swine." Thus, Pandora's Box exemplified. Or better said, a very low tolerance for normal behavior.

The female sufferer feels high levels of anxiety during



PMS because of the neuroses she is experiencing, as indicated by the previous conversations, and so must be on high alert in order to attack her offenders at short notice. One prime example of this is exhibited by the female's driving methods. She, when not suffering from PMS, has the patience of Job, the demeanor of Mother Theresa, and the sweetness of a fresh peach, which is characterized by her innocent defensive driving. She is courteous, follows all safety regulations, smiles and waves to strangers, and is pleasant to the children while she transports them. In fact, she will often occupy the children by singing group songs, encouraging their participation. The PMSing woman, however, has the patience of a hungry cougar, the demeanour of Atilla the Hun, and the bitterness of an adult aspirin as it mistakenly dissolves in the mouth. This is exemplified by her aggressive, offensive driving. The suffering female, when carrying out normal duties, takes off like a bat out of hell as she recklessly speeds to her destination, passing and cussing motorists who are unfortunately in her way. This "woman from hell" does not abide by safety regulations and flagrantly resorts to the fine art of screaming at children while driving. Police officers can automatically spot a PMS driver and, with sirens wailing, generally retreat in the opposite direction. Upon completion of the assigned duties, the female hormonally reasons that she is ravenous and searches for a bit of nourishment for the long journey home.

A PMS appetite is characterized by consuming large quantities of foods of very low quality, such as coffee, chocolate, ice cream, hamburgers, fries, pizza, cokes, and any other food which facilitates water retention and weight gain. These foods and beverages are the substances the PMS sufferer craves, and so, they are the foods that will be consumed. Many doctors have questioned this phenomenon and have no cure or answer other than that the PMS woman should eliminate these foods. The same advice should be given to males pondering a romantic evening with a female just prior to ovulation. Very precise, astute, intuitive advice only a doctor would give.

A very wise male member of the judicial system recently found a wife, who was suffering from PMS, not guilty of the crime of murdering her husband. She did, in fact, murder her husband and the judge knew this; however, he found her not guilty based upon temporary insanity. Whether he did this because he was fearful of the defendant, or because his wife was a chronic sufferer of PMS is unknown. However, that verdict has, in essence, given the premenstrual female who is bloated like a fish, cranky, has low tolerance for her mate, is highly anxious, and certainly hungry, a license to kill. Men, run for you llllllllllllives!!!

## Chicken Shit

Debra Galliher

"Deb, I need some space..."

Right. Take it from someone else  
who has some to give.



Judith Ratcliff

Untitled

**Amber Dye**

**(untitled)**

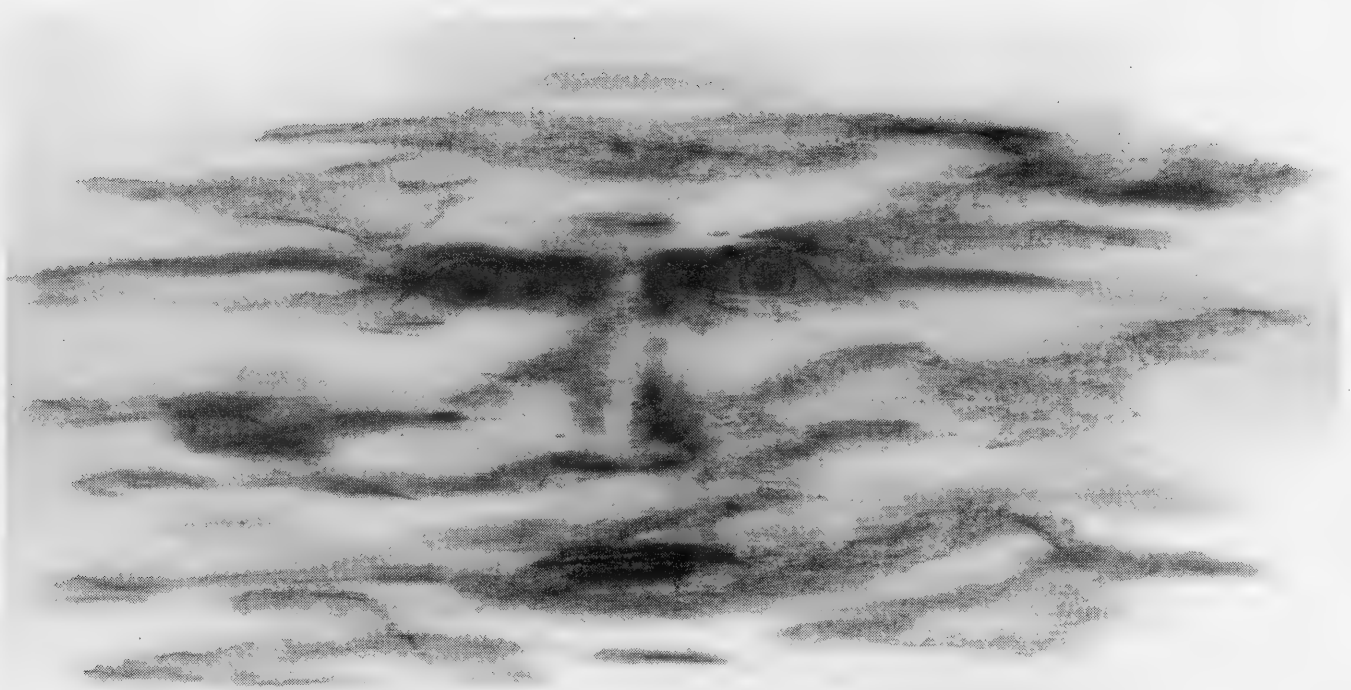
When I look in the mirror  
I see the past;  
when I look in myself  
I see the future;  
Which is a true reflection?  
Which is a stronger desire?

Like children abandoned  
in the darkness  
of their fears,  
I have seen  
the abyss  
of a person's heart  
swallowing others up  
like a hungry tiger.

**Amber Dye**

**(untitled)**





*S. Jacobs*

# Amber Dye

*(untitled)*

I laugh but I want to cry,  
I hear but I want to speak,  
I write but I want to be heard;  
Isn't anyone listening?



## Your Fiftieth Parade

Debra Galliher

That leather skirt  
sounds like a new saddle  
on a fine filly  
prancing in a downtown parade.  
It sings with each precisioned step,  
fitting every move to a tee.  
Dancing parade lights make  
fanciful geometrics  
and attract  
admiring glances.  
"Parades come and go," you say  
and smile to yourself,  
enjoying the parade again.

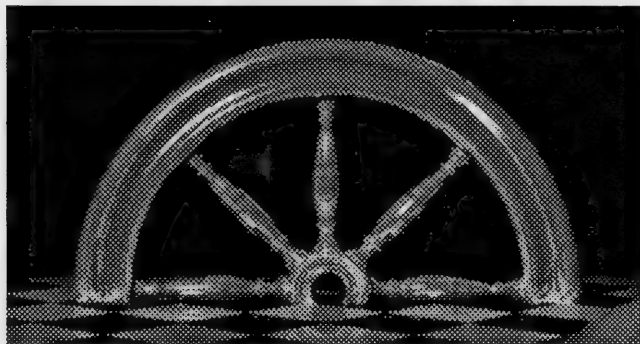
# It Doesn't Really Change, Does It.

*Debra Galliher*

You were just a girl then.  
At seventeen you owned  
your own football field,  
a couple of hearts,  
a bus-full of kids,  
and an electric beauty kit  
you put in your hair  
every morning.  
I barely know you  
but proudly told anyone  
of our sisterhood.  
No one gave me their heart  
in trade for my information.







Twelve years later  
you shrunk your field  
to two bedrooms  
and a microwave;  
you own outright two  
fresh little hearts  
who fill your car  
with confined commotion;  
you've loaned, and borrowed back,  
your electric beauty kit to me,  
who has burgled  
a couple of hearts  
a couple of times.



Tang K. Heng

Lazy Water

The following four essays were submitted in the Spring 1992 honors scholarship competition at CCCC.

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## Excellence in Education: What it Means to Me

Jayne Creelman

About this time last year I spent a great deal of time on the couch, eating Oreos, and watching *Days of Our Lives*. The memory pains me. This Spring I find myself in a college library, quietly sneaking trail mix, and contemplating excellence in education. A marked improvement; surprisingly of my own making.

Returning to college is a gift I have given myself. It is also a gift that is passed from teacher to student and back again with no separation. Education is not like money (when it is given away, it's gone), but learning grows with its exchange and becomes more abundant with each offering. Excellence in education requires nurturing. Good educators and students work at creating a "clearing" for one another to discover areas of interest and talent and allow for experimentation

with possibilities. Student and teacher should expect top performance from each other, meaning honest and concerted effort, and be interested enough to challenge when less is given. Though they take no oath as doctors do, educators have an obligation to expect excellence from students and, with the expectation, are likely to get it. Students in turn will enter their world with the knowledge and confidence to educate and contribute to others.

Education is self-love in action. A return to college for me after a twelve year absence was intimidating at best; however, the sense of accomplishment gained at going beyond my previous limits of mediocrity far outshines the initial fears. And as for *Days of Our Lives*, well, I believe that's why a well-educated someone invented the VCR.

## Excellence in Education: What Does it Mean to Me?

Bill Monsees

Many educators find the enticement of reform crusades and quests for excellence irresistible. With the traditional logic of true believers, they strand themselves upon Medusa islands of programs, policies, and agendas. I support their right to mental suicide; excellence is not democratic. It recognizes neither the consensus nor the limits of the times.

Educationally, excellence is the passionate Nemesis of compliance and definition. Education is a passion. It is the sparked and kindled fire of romance, the magic and wonder of transformation, the result of imagination tempered with experience. Excellence resides in the endeavor itself, in the spirit, and never

within the labyrinth of the profane. It is a quality that transcends the obscenity of words. And yet, it is in words that excellence has its genesis. For, excellence is a human quality. Being such, it needs the generation and sustenance derived from positive verbal interaction between students and teachers-as-students.

Ironically, the same intangibles that free excellence from the bounds of mediocrity are those that competition, control, and label infected intellectual atmospheres dread and discount most. The labyrinth of the profane is immense; books and bones and pretenders all have their paid defenders. Excellence, meanwhile, remembers falls as lessons and failures as preludes to ascent.



Justin Leger

Freed from Theory



# Excellence Equals Kinetic

Holly K. Powell

"In the beginning...the earth was without form and void" (Genesis 1:2).

Education is the element introduced to shape a formless mind into a viable, productive person. Education turns potential energy into kinetic energy. Encouragement is the intrinsic catalyst needed to begin the process of learning. A kindergartner has the desire to try again because the teacher encouraged him. A 30-year-old mother of four takes the terrifying step to start college because someone encouraged her. The transformation has begun—potential to kinetic.

Educational excellence is achieved by new methods, not old, by fresh experiences, not ancient practices, through creativity, not recitation. Originality is what causes the lessons to be remembered. Creativity is the spark needed to transform an opaque, empty mind into glowing, fertile consciousness—potential to kinetic.

Although education cannot truly create life, it does much to give meaning—shape and substance. Education develops potential energy. Excellence in education converts potential to kinetic. "...and there was light. And God saw ... that it was good" (Genesis 1:4).

## Excellence in Education—What it Means to Me

Tina Miller

To the Professors,

When you reveal to me the world you have learned, you inspire me to discover it with my own mind. By stimulating me to ask questions, you invite my curiosity to grow. When you advocate me, you support my natural ability to trust. With inspiration, stimulation, and support I am able to think for myself. When I think for myself, I turn problems into solutions. These are the tools you give me when you are an excellent educator.

When I appreciate excellence in education, I bring to the world my open mindedness. When I am

open minded, I am a compassionate, proficient listener because I am receptive to the ideas of others, encouraging unrestrained dialogue. As an individual with an open mind, I have the capacity to see things differently, making me flexible. Flexibility is the foundation of creativity. These are the gifts I give to myself when I choose to be educated.

Your tools help me discover my gifts. That is what excellence in education means to me.

# Reflections on Homer's "Odyssey": Journeyman's Prayer

Sharon Sedlacek

All-knowing God, direct my journey.

Lead me  
out of the Ogygia of indulgent self-pity  
that would stifle my sense of purpose.

Wake me  
from the lotus-haze of complacency  
that would suggest satisfaction  
with less than my highest aims.

Free me  
from single-visioned selfishness  
that would crush my humanity.

Protect me  
from the greed that would unleash  
the destructive winds of envy and jealousy  
and divert me from my course.

Guide me  
through the narrow way, between the  
engulfing Kharybdis of apathy and the  
clutching Skylla of self-glorifying ambition.

Strengthen my resolve  
against the Siren-promise of material knowledge,  
that I may value spiritual understanding as the  
higher knowledge.

Grant me  
the courage to face the dark Hades  
of my greatest fears, that I may emerge  
in a rebirth of enlightenment.

Loving father of all:  
Shape my character as a potter moulds his clay.  
Purify my soul.  
Make me worthy of my place in eternity.



Kerry McCullough

Untitled

## Mimosas With Life

Amber Dye

*Roots are joined by a union,  
the budding of the trunks  
are separated at the foundation.  
They slowly grow apart,  
only to be rejoined,  
by the entangling of the branches,  
to form an endless life together.*



# She's Not Me

Carla Kraft

HELLO AGAIN MY FRIEND  
I LOOK AT YOU LOOK AT ME  
AND I WONDER WHAT YOU SEE  
I THINK I KNOW BUT SHE'S NOT ME

WHEN YOU FIND HER YOU WILL KNOW  
THE PLACE, THE TIME, ETERNITY  
BLEND IN PERFECT HARMONY  
I KNOW I KNOW SHE'S NOT ME

THE MAGIC MOMENT'S NOT OF YOU  
FOR HE CHOSE WHEN IT WILL BE  
BECAUSE IT'S DESTINY YOU SEE  
NOW YOU KNOW SHE'S NOT ME

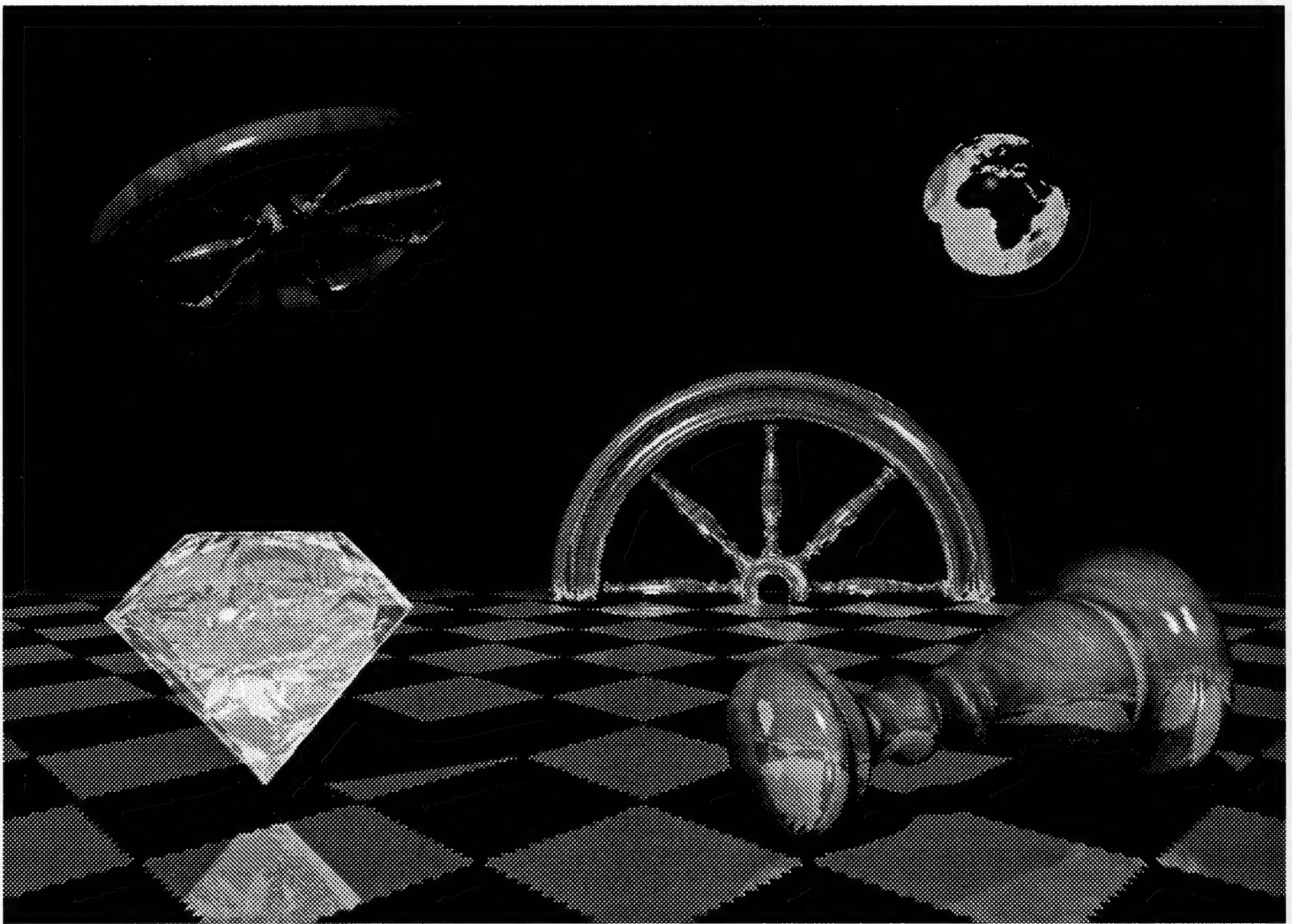
## Pithy Notes About Student Contributors

Jayne Creelman takes a look at education and tells us that one really can give up some TV time. Nancy Davenport draws our attention to the uncommon in each of us. Pamela DiFazio looks introspectively at the world as a geologic formation, her lens often finding strata others are unaware of. Brian Douce spent the summer at The Royal College of Art in London—his objective at CCCC is to major in landscape architecture. He reports that people tell him he is "bold." Amber Dye graduated from CCCC with a major in Psychology and is now at UTD in the Arts and Performance Department. She says she has had a compulsion to write since junior high, and tries to focus on emotions, expressing them in terms of tangible, visual objects. Debra Galliher's work explores the ambiguity that our world presents to us each day and asks us to make a choice for life. Steve Gaston went from CCCC to take Robert Nelsen's Writer's Workshop at UTD; he says, "I don't really make up stories, I get an idea and fill in the rest." Kang T. Heng produces images that energize us through their power. Sandy Hernandez wrote her story as a project—her grandmother had just passed away. Her story was also published in a newsletter distributed to nurses. Janice Honea says that hand coloring allows her to move a photograph from reality to the realm of fantasy. Kay Jacobs expresses childhoods' less mild experiences in paint. Steven Jacobs is a practicing engineer and an aspiring artist. His submission, *The Universal I*, originally conceived as a student project, illustrates this basic conflict. Cindy Johnson's poetry speaks of the inner peace that music can bring. Carla Kraft helps us discover who we are—reading her work triggers an exploration of our inner selves. Don Killen is enrolled in a degree program in Literary Studies at UTD. Justin Leger looks at a world yet unborn and asks questions any of us might pose. John R. Lynn scrutinizes contemporary architecture, assessing form through his photography. Kerry McCullough explores mankind's face through the medium of clay. Tina Miller's capsule of what education should be is worth pondering. Victoria Monfort watches the crowd and tries to discover herself among the masses. Bill Monsees tells us we must approach education with a passion for excellence. Greg Nichols is an accomplished photographer making his own palladium contact prints—he photographs buildings and people from unusual angles to bring freshness and mystery to his art. Jane Piscionieri-Wuederman reflects on a timeless tale and brings new focus to the self-exploration that every person must do when presented with ever-present ambiguity. Holly K. Powell photographs the aspects of life that some can never experience. Judith Ratcliff explores the human form and spirit through her haunting clay sculptures. Barbara Reed is a student at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX, where she studies sociology. She says, "I have to write...when you should write something, it will make itself known, and you just have to go and sit down and do it." Sharon Sedlacek describes herself as "a writer who uses pen and paper the way an artist uses brushes and canvas." Debbie Sehnert called from Ohio to say that her stories seek to explore emotions and self discovery. Connie Singleton who is currently concentrating on math and history, writes from actual life experiences. Janet Sherrill studies humankind through the medium of her art. Susan L. Wilson says, "I do quite a bit of experimentation with materials in my work. The idea of order from chaos appeals to me, and I try to put this in whatever I'm working with—stone, plaster, cement, clay or paint."

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